

## HARRISON AT PEACH TREE CREEK.

## SPLENDID GALLANTRY OF A FUTURE PRESIDENT IN A SANGUINARY MELEE.

The Twentieth Corps, Officers and Men—Brilliant Deeds on Many Fields—Resaca's Glorious Day—The Storm of Battle Bursts in Full Force Before Atlanta.

By G. H. BLAKESLEE, 129th Ill.

Of Gen. Sherman's combined armies of 84,000 men who started upon the Atlanta campaign of 1864 none were exalted more by their grand heroism, splendid fighting and terrible losses than the noble Army of the Cumberland, under the lead of Gen. George H. Thomas, the "Rock of Chickamauga." Of this army, judged in all its lights and shadows, what corps can compare with that incomparable Twentieth Corps, marshaled by that ideal leader, Maj.-Gen. Joseph Hooker?

Subordinate to him were a brilliant trio of division commanders, to each of whom the fame of the Twentieth Corps and Fighting Joe was very dear, and to which they were ever proud to be a unit.

To speak of Williams, commanding the First Division, was only to remind us of the mighty Thomas as something eminently solid and immovable, and wherever the battle was on the division headquarters flag, with its flaming red star, was well to the front, and from which it never fell back.

So, too, was John W. Geary, of the Second or White Star Division, who had won imperishable laurels in all campaigns of the Potomac Army up to the fall of 1863, when, transferred to the West, it fought that meteoric night battle of Wauhatchie, Oct. 27, followed a month later by the most thrilling battle episode of all modern history, Lookout Mountain.

The Third Division was an aggregation of veterans from both the East and West, in which the West had the largest representation.

These men had fought under Buell in Kentucky, with Rosecrans in Tennessee, were with Granger in Reserve Corps, and had finally, after Mission Ridge, drifted into the Eleventh Corps with Howard.

When the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps were consolidated they formed the new Twentieth Corps, and a new star appeared on the horizon and which rose higher and shone brighter as the days went by, until the pages of battle history are resplendent with the glory of the "Blue Star Division."

To command this division Gen. Hooker sent his most trusted Chief of Staff, the brilliant and knightly Butterfield—who at Fair Oaks and Gaines's Mill had won the Congressional Medal of Honor, so grudgingly bestowed in the old war days, and which but few received.

To these Western men Butterfield was comparatively a stranger, but his name, coupled with that of Hooker, sent a thrill through their breasts, which gave them faith he would lead them where the fighting was to be found, and so were content. He gloriously exemplified their faith.

## The First Brigade.

His three brigades were commanded as follows: The First Brigade, by Gen. Wm. T. Ward; the Second, by Col. John Coburn; the Third, by Col. Wood.

These brigades were composed of five regiments each, but as our story will have to do more particularly with only the First Brigade, and who were all Western men, we give the regiments composing its formation: 79th Ohio, Col. Kennett; 70th Ind., Col. Bell; Harrison; 102d Ill., Col. F. C. Smith; 105th Ill., Col. Dan Dustin; 129th Ill., Col. Henry Case.

This brigade moved from its winter cantonment in Lookout Valley on May 2, 1864, was first under fire on the 13th, also on the 14th and 15th of May, and on the 16th it moved from the center of our lines, which were then wrapping around the enemy at Resaca, to near the extreme left and astride the Dalton pike.

On the 14th of May two separate assaults from other corps had been made by division upon a rebel fort known to the Confederates as Fort Cobb. This was at the angle of their lines of works on the northwest, and immediately above the Dalton pike, where it entered the Confederate lines at Red Knob Gap. Both assaults had proven costly failures.

On Sunday, May 15, Butterfield was ordered to see what he could do, so putting his First Brigade in motion as the assaulting column, the Second to support and the Third Brigade in reserve, the drive was made and the battery captured with a loss to the division in 20 minutes of 963 officers and men, but we gained the key to the rebel position with Corps's (Cherokee artillery), four heavy 12-pounder Napoleons, "the only dogs that had the muzzle

the pages of history and whose achievements did not end until peace had spread its gentle wings over all the land.

## Harrison's Promotion.

While to many the change of commanders was an evil to be deplored, yet we all felt glad when the Colonel of the 70th Ind.—he who so gallantly led the brigade over the Confederate works at Resaca—was raised to command of the First Brigade, for we knew he had fairly earned his promotion.

Out of the kaleidoscopic medley of pictures of war, some of them vivid and some dimmed by time, which the mention of the Atlanta campaign brings up to my mind, there always springs to the front the presentment and deeds of the one man, heroic, most daringly courageous and remarkably successful in a limited sphere, that I ever saw in the field—no other than Benjamin Harrison, commander of the First Brigade.

As the 129th Ill. reached the crest of the ridge it became engaged as the advance of the Confederate line, reached that line from the south at almost the same moment, and the deadly struggle was on.

On the left front of that regiment was broad meadow of cleared land and a wooded hill, and from the woodland beyond the enemy, in unbroken columns, came like the waves of the sea, pitiless and in grand form upon us. Our batteries swung into position, and the hissing shell exploded in their crowded ranks. The boys were firing at close range, and the line in front melted away; yet it closed up, and on it came, again and determined. A gap of nearly half a mile on our left between us and Newton, which Coburn and Wood were to close, was still open, and the vigilant enemy took advantage and two regiments of Featherstone's passed our flank as well as may be, while the rest of the regiment were attending to business on the front.

Now Stewart's men were at us, coming on the run, not 100 yards away. The 102d Ill. dove straight at the 40th Miss. and tore them to pieces. There blue and gray coils lay side by side, and the 31st and 33d Miss., consolidated and commanded by Col. Jabez L. Drake, broke through the 129th Ill., reformed their lines, faced about and charged back again, cutting and slashing and losing in our immediate front 75 per cent of its members, every regimental officer killed or wounded. But once their faces turned from us, their retreat was accelerated by wild huzzahs of the old regiment, until the Confederates reach their reserves. This was a fight where there was no rear, and where the forwards and backs had the slightest chance.

Wild Work Repeated. But the day's work was but begun. That wonderful discipline manifested by the veterans of the South rallied the broken troops, and drove them back upon us again and again. Hardly giving us time to rest, they came with their cartridge boxes, we are appraised by the well-known rebel yell that they still meant business.

Suddenly and in heavy force they emerged from the woods, and with sage yells, which echoed over the hills, they came, exultant with the idea of driving the Yanks into the Chattahoochee.

Gen. Hood had given out to his men that morning that there was nothing before them but a few raw troops—three-months men—and who would be easily put to flight by a few of their veterans. But that day they were met by a force that would hardly give a chance for anything in the line of fight excepting long-distance shots as we were running away. Imagine the surprise of the people, coming to the aid of the brigade which had met before on several fields. No wonder that one captain, disgraced with the situation, turned to the soldiers and said, "I am exclaiming: 'They told us we had nothing to meet here but some little sons of reserves, who we could easily run over, but my God! these are those 'Blue Stars'!"

But now, on Sunday, the fourth time that afternoon, the rushing, roaring hosts in gray, led by one whose name was a host itself, Alex. P. Stewart, and the blue and gray, who had never stood out to go down in death. The boys' "tore their cartridges with feverish impatience," and with blackened hands, waving their streaming sweat from their powder-stained faces, they drew a line fire drove at the Confederate ranks with a spite that killed.

Tom Flynn, commanding the regiment, was standing up and down the line, and yelled out "Look sharp, boys! Hell's turned loose for dinner!" Nearer and nearer came the rebels, with a rush and a roar, two to our one, heads bent low, bayonets fixed over their eyes, guns at the long trail.

Harrison, seeing the danger of a break, rushed into our midst, shouting, "Stand firm, boys, and the day is ours." "Oh, my God!" he yelled, a huge quiver from one cheek to the other, "Never you mind, Colonel; look out for the other fellows; these are Illinoisans; they never fail."

Who should this not remain a picture on one's memory? In front was the coming line tipped with fire and flame. The smoke of our guns leaping out in front slowly rises, forming a curtain of fire, and the enemy, who were coming from the clouds above. At intervals we catch a glimpse of foemen's faces, blackened with powder and glaring with demonic fury, lost to all human feelings and full of the most ferocious and desperate hate. No longer men, but, rather, devil incarnate.

Here stands a line of men ready for this rushing and advancing foe. But in the body of that regiment, that day, the steel-strung nerves of Illinois, who, with slow but precise movement, load and fire their guns with terrible effect. The line in front like leaves in Autumn, of a fine gray, they are all dead, and the line of the rattling rain blends into a continuous sound of musketry. Guns grow hot to the touch, and the others, who are those who live, with the blood of the fallen flow around on every side—above, below—there swept a storm of bullets such as was never seen before or since. Out of that fire came the 102d Ill., at once, but it was not engaged in front delivered an enfilading fire from their Henry rifles upon the foe in front; but the gallant foe could not be so easily quit firing, and the clang of steel, fixing bayonets, told of a glorified heroism.

Harrison, dashing to and fro, inspired the boys with confidence, his voice ringing above that of the guns, giving encouragement to any faltering ones. And now, with teeth set tightly, the line of blue rushed at the line of gray; there met with polished steel the fearful onset, and the First Brigade, fresh from Resaca and the Allatoona Hills, were at it again.

The fearful impact of those five double lines with dreadful force carried them through our lines, meeting with the troops that had flanked our left, half, face about and with augmented force came tearing back, with a rush and a roar, and the boys endeavored to carry with them the 129th Ill.

To its credit, be it said, the old regiment stood like a rock in the pathway of our opponents. "Surrender, you Yanks!" "No!" was heard shouted from the frenzied Confederates all along the line; an answering cry from the blue coats, "Surrender yourselves, you!"

Men and officers went down, but no one thought to lose the day and field. Overhead lay the sulphurous smoke of battle; all around us, the air was filled with the dying and the wounded. It was only war's wild splendor. Could I but shut out the vision of carnage and the crimson-hued hill at Peach Tree Creek! Could we but forget the mangled bodies of the living and those pale in death, or friends—all Americans—or forever still the cry of our opponents, "Surrender, you Yanks!"

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The Peach Tree Creek battlefield was a series of clearings and oak openings, now and then a clump of underbrush and occasional ravines. The Confederate line of attack, as personally given the writer by Lieut.-Gen. Alexander P. Stewart, C. S. A., "was by division in echelon, five lines deep, each brigade preceding the one on the left, some 100 yards, with orders to force the enemy back to the creek; if found entrenched, drive him out with the bayonet."

Loring's Division of Stewart's Corps were the fellows on our front, and were the men who that day furnished the entertainment, although only Featherstone's Brigade came in actual contact with our portion of the line. It was an entertainment such as was furnished us on but a few fields and where the women got a taste of the medicine they had been feeding us along the way under the direction of the wily Johnston.

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straining and struggling for the mastery, while above it all there waved the tattered flag, "Old Glory."

Every man realized that the crisis had come, that by the mettle of the man the issue was to be decided. Hand to hand, back and forth, again and yet again they rushed with thrust and cut, and the 129th Ill. was the only one that was not a battery coming into position. Then a lull in the crash and roar of battle—even the stillness is oppressive.

Look away out yonder beyond that field of waving corn. We see the gleaming of the sunshine on the burnished steel. Look on those solid columns—at their front, their flanks, Hush! Hush! do you hear? It's the coming of Hood's veterans. In close columns by regiments—Featherstone's Mississippians in echelon; flags waving in that evening breeze; arms at right angles, and the only one on parade mounted orderlies dashing to and fro, bearing orders and cheering on those men. Every rifle barrel, every bayonet gleams like silver in that evening sun.

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That day is history—its tragedies ended, its foemen friends, its magnificent bravery on one side shadowed by the splendid courage on the other. It was a stand-up fight on an open field for the supremacy of American manhood. On the one side was the socially superior, the other, the socially inferior, of victory with the army in blue; on the other, the gloom of defeat. On that awful Wednesday evening two civilizations struggled for the mastery and the only one that was not a battery coming into position. Then a lull in the crash and roar of battle—even the stillness is oppressive.

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